

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at a Ceremony Honoring the National Association of Police Organizations TOP COPS

May 12, 2012

The President. Thank you, everybody. Please, please, have a seat.

Well, welcome to the White House. It is wonderful to be with all of you. It is especially good to be with somebody who has been fighting on behalf of law enforcement all his life. Everywhere I go, in every community, people see the track record and the legacy of Joe Biden's work when it comes to looking after law enforcement. And so I just want to thank my Vice President, who has shown leadership in this administration to make sure you guys have what you need.

My Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, is here. She does outstanding work. The Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and a longtime police officer, Gil Kerlikowske, is here. Give Gil a big round of applause. Representative John Conyers is here. And of course, I want to welcome the leaders of the National Association of Police Organizations, including your president, Tom Nee. Tom told me he just had a new granddaughter.

Thomas J. Nee. Grandson.

The President. Grandson. What's his name?

Mr. Nee. Nicholas Joseph.

The President. Nicholas Joseph. So give him a round of applause for that.

You know, I look forward to this event each and every year, because it's a chance to say thank you. Every day, hundreds of thousands of law enforcement officers keep our neighborhoods safe, and frankly, they don't ask for a lot. They don't ask for a lot of credit. They don't go to work planning to be heroes. They just do their jobs.

But when you put on that badge, you assume a special responsibility. And every time you put it on, you never know if this day will be the day that you've spent your entire career training for—the day when just doing your job and being a hero are exactly the same thing. For the men and women standing behind me, America's TOP COPS, that day came. And when it did, they were ready. They didn't flinch. They didn't back off. There are people who are alive today only because of their courage.

I had a chance to just shake each one of these individuals' hands and express my appreciation to them personally. They're a pretty humble group. Some of them will tell you they don't deserve to be called heroes; they're entitled to their opinion. [*Laughter*] I disagree with them. I think they are. What else do you call a team that takes down a deranged gunman and saves countless lives? Or a unit that flies a helicopter into dangerous winds and pulls off a daring nighttime rescue? Or an officer who, after being shot three times, switches her gun from her right hand to her left, so that she can return fire until backup arrives?

I guarantee you that when the bullets were flying, when lives were on the line, these men and women weren't thinking about bravery. They weren't thinking of themselves. Instead, they

were looking out for their fellow officers and for the civilians that they swore to protect. And when they return home, they'll go back to being just another member of the team.

But they've earned this moment. Today we celebrate 34 extraordinary individuals, and we recognize the sacrifices they and their fellow officers make. Some of our TOP COPS are still recovering from gunshot wounds. I'm sure that many are, even now, thinking of a partner or a teammate who fell in the line of duty.

So we honor their memories today. We honor all those who have put their lives on the line in order to protect their fellow citizens, even if they were complete strangers. I hope that we also pledge to learn something from the example that they set. Because while most of us will never be asked to run straight into a hail of bullets or chase down an armed suspect on foot, we also have responsibilities to meet.

For those of us in elected office, that includes helping States and cities to keep first-responders on the job. It includes supporting cutting-edge tools they need, from a high-speed public safety broadband network to a new generation of mobile apps.

Even as we do everything we can to support men and women like our TOP COPS, and to make police work safer and more effective, we do have to recognize that one thing will never change. Our safety will always depend on the quiet heroism of ordinary Americans, like the ones that we recognize today. We will be forever in debt to those who wear the badge, to men and women with a deep sense of duty and a willingness to serve and sacrifice on our behalf. And I think these individuals don't mind me saying that they are representative of the sacrifices and that quiet courage that exists among law enforcement officers all across the country, and their families, because I know the strains of families in such a difficult job is significant as well. And those families, those of you who are here today, we want to say thank you to you as well.

So again, to the 2012 TOP COPS, thank you for everything you do. God bless you and your families, and God bless the United States of America. All right.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Vice President Joe Biden.

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